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Laila Winner

Portland State University

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THE SCIENCE OF PERSUASION IN RECENT DISCOURSE ON T.R. MALTHUS:
AN EXERCISE IN THE ANALYSIS OF RHETORIC IN ECONOMICS

by

LAILA WINNER

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

BACHELOR OF ARTS WITH HONORS

in

ECONOMICS

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2008

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“So far, French policy-makers have often pursued a pessimistic, Malthusian approach to unemployment, relying on early retirement schemes and working time reductions. Admittedly, this approach has had some positive side-effects. As French output is produced by a comparatively small share of the adult population in a limited working time, the individual efficiency of workers is high.” – “Beauty is not skin deep,” *FT Business*, January 8 2008.

“The pessimistic parson and early political economist remains as wrong as ever.”
“Malthus, the false prophet; Economics focus,” *The Economist*, May 17 2008.

Introduction:

A Project of Rehabilitation

Of all the dour portraits lining the august halls of Economics, it is that of Thomas Robert Malthus which seems perhaps to scowl the most grimly. Describing an approach or policy as *Malthusian* in everyday conversation conjures a host of disturbing images, bare fields and squalling babies chief among them. Such allusions provoke even stronger reactions within the discipline Malthus helped to found, ranging from Keynes's fervent championship to the sneering dismissal of Samuelson. Neither the more famous Smith nor Ricardo nor even Marx can claim to have gained in their lives what the comparatively less prolific Reverend did with one essay: A reputation for cosmic pessimism that has endured for nearly two centuries.

It is a general interest in the methods by which this reputation was shaped and is presently being challenged that motivates this paper's inquiry. In 1998 leading Malthus scholar A.M.C Waterman published "Reappraisal of 'Malthus the economist,' 1798 – 1804," a review of significant contributions to Malthus studies in the second half of the 20th century. "Reappraisal" prompted passionate responses from established Malthus scholars Donald Winch, Samuel Hollander, and John Pullen shortly after its publication, effectively shifting the community's focus from assessing Malthus's contributions to economics to assessing the methodological means by which this was to be done – in other words, of shifting the focus from questions of *what Malthus really meant* to questions of *how economics is really practiced*.

This exchange in 1998 was an important moment in a discourse which has for the past 25 years sought to destabilize the accepted view of Malthus as conservative misanthrope and establish his work as pivotal in the history of economics. The output of Hollander, Pullen, Waterman and Winch combined totals nearly 30 journal articles and books, and it is largely thanks to their efforts that of the classical economists it is Malthus who has undergone the most significant reappraisal in recent years. Though a thorough history of *how* the accepted view of Malthus came to be is far beyond the scope of this inquiry, an examination of a selection of contemporary work on Malthus will prove equally effective in illuminating the ways in which our perceptions of economists – and, consequently, our understandings of economic texts – are shaped. How are modern scholars challenging the traditional view of Malthus, and to what purpose? Where do they situate Malthus with respect to existing literature? To what extent does the practice of history inform the practice of economics, and vice versa? These are the issues which this paper seeks to address.

Hollander, Pullen, Waterman, and Winch may be engaged in the same intellectual project but in approach and methodology they differ sufficiently to invite comparison. The focus of this inquiry will be the diverse ways in which the four scholars work to structure and persuade readers of their arguments – that is, on the various rhetorical devices they employ. An explication and analysis of these devices will provide a framework not only for examining the means by which perceptions of Malthus are shaped, but for examining the development of the discourse over time, as well. Since an exhaustive survey of the four scholars' work is not the principle aim of this paper,

discussion will be limited to texts central to the development of the discourse and to the individual scholars' overarching arguments. It will be argued that the rhetorical devices employed by Hollander, Pullen, Waterman, and Winch work not only to position Malthus as a crucial figure in economics, but in ways that support the scholars' respective versions of the history of the discipline.

Some definition of terms is necessary at this point. The method I employ in my analysis will rely heavily on the groundbreaking work of Deirdre McCloskey, author of *The Rhetoric of Economics*. Her definition of rhetoric, taken largely from Wayne Booth's *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*, is as follows:

Rhetoric is "the art of probing what men believe they ought to believe, rather than proving what is true according to abstract methods"; it is "the art of discovering good reasons, finding what really warrants assent, because any reasonable person ought to be persuaded"; it is "careful weighing of more-or-less good reasons to arrive at more-or-less probable or plausible conclusions – none too secure but better than would be arrived at by chance or unthinking impulse"; it is the "art of discovering warrantable beliefs and improving those beliefs shared in discourse"; its purpose must not be "to talk someone else into a preconceived view; rather, it must be to engage in mutual inquiry (Booth, 1974, pp. xiii, xiv, 59, 137) ... Rhetoric is exploring thought by conversation.¹

If rhetoric is "exploring thought by conversation," then a rhetorical device is that which is employed by participants in such a conversation to structure, support and persuade. It is in the spirit of McCloskey's inquiry that this survey of recent literature on Malthus will be undertaken, with attention being paid to devices such as tropes and appeals to authority. I will also, however, not hesitate to identify and explicate rhetorical devices operating at a broader structural level when I feel it appropriate. This will be

¹ McCloskey, "The Rhetoric of Economics," *Journal of Economic Literature* 21.2 (1983): 482 – 83.

most necessary in dealing with economic historians Winch and Hollander, whose projects are far greater in scope than their colleagues Waterman and Pullen.

Finally, a word on what has been rather glibly and perhaps problematically referred to as “the history of economics.” Historians of economics acknowledge that since its inception in the 18th century there have been two distinct turning points within the discipline: The first, occurring sometime in the 19th century, was the increased “mathematicization” of economics; the second, occurring in the 20th century, was the development and increased use of quantitative analysis. As economics became increasingly understood as a “science,” the methods of the “non-scientific” disciplines such as law and history came to be regarded as ineffective and irrelevant. As a result the majority of those who today identify themselves as economists are uncomfortable with – if not upset by – the idea that their work requires the employment of rhetorical devices aimed at establishing fact – not just the objective reporting of fact. The extent to which this attitude informs the histories that economists and historians of economics construct in projects such as Hollander, Pullen, Waterman, and Winch’s holds long-term implications for the relevance and intellectual integrity of the discipline.

The paper will comprise four sections devoted to examining the work of Hollander, Pullen, Waterman and Winch individually. After first briefly discussing pertinent biographical information about each scholar, a review of his contribution to the discourse will be provided. I will then explicate the argumentative techniques and rhetorical

devices that are employed consistently throughout the body of the scholar's contribution, concluding each section with a comparison of the scholars discussed.

I. A.M.C. Waterman

Anthony Michael C. Waterman presently teaches Economics at St. John's College, Winnipeg. The volume of Waterman's direct contribution to the discourse is fairly modest, consisting of a book and four journal articles published between the years 1987 and 1999. However with his 1998 review article "Reappraisal of 'Malthus the Economist,' 1933 – 97" Waterman was the first to turn a critical eye towards recent work in Malthus studies, provoking responses from Hollander, Pullen, and Winch. For the purposes of mapping these responses, Waterman's treatment of Malthus will be discussed first.

Of the four articles pertinent to this inquiry, two may be described as straightforward attempts at what economists call *rational* or *mathematical* reconstruction. The primary objective of a rational reconstruction is to express in mathematical terms what was originally expressed with prose – that is, to show the mathematics one argues are assumed by an economic text. In his 1987 article "On the Malthusian theory of long swings" Waterman argues that Malthus's famous geometrical and mathematical ratios "presuppose a logarithmic production function" which may be read to imply the famous "wages fund doctrine."² "Analysis and Ideology in Malthus's *Essay on Population*" with its somewhat broader focus posits that Malthus wrote his Essay to refute the "Jacobin" attack against private property, and seeks to "reconstruct the 'economic analysis' which may be found in the *Essay* ... to show how that analysis is consistent" with the

² Waterman, "On the Malthusian theory of long swings," *Canadian Journal of Economics* 20.2 (1987): 257.

ideological purpose of its author.³ Each of these rational reconstructions is similar in length and structure and proceeds along the same methodological lines: After introducing the scope, argument, and assumptions of his inquiry, Waterman moves on to discuss his reasons for subjecting the work of Malthus to rational reconstruction. He then proceeds to “translate” Malthus’s words into mathematically-defined terms, axioms and functions, citing and situating his approach with respect to the work of predecessors such as Stigler and Samuelson. Waterman concludes both articles with a summary of findings, emphasizing the indispensable role of rational reconstruction in the analysis of economic texts.

Revolution, Economics, and Religion: Christian Political Economy, 1798 – 1833 constitutes Waterman’s foray into intellectual history. Although Malthus is not its primary focus, the Reverend does appear as a central character in Waterman’s story of political economy and theology in 19th-century England. Waterman argues that it was ultimately Malthus’s unique integration of theology and deductive political economy that routed the English promoters of “Jacobinism”: “The essential ingredient in Malthus’s victory, and that which was entirely new in counter-revolutionary polemic of the time, was the ‘new science’ of political economy. The unassailable prestige of Newton’s scientific method, and that method itself, first appropriated to the study of human social phenomena by David Hume ... were brilliantly deployed by Malthus to show that *both* Burke *and* Godwin were wrong: and wrong for the same reason.”⁴

³ Waterman, “Analysis and Ideology in Malthus’s ‘Essay on Population’,” *Australian Economic Papers* 31 (1992): 203.

⁴ Waterman, *Revolution, Economics, and Religion: Christian Political Economy, 1798 – 1833* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 5.

In the somewhat lengthier third article, “Malthus, Mathematics, and the Mythology of Coherence,” mathematical analysis becomes the subject of inquiry, rather than the method by which the inquiry is carried out. By engaging in an analysis of the language used in Malthus’s *Essay on Population*, Waterman endeavors to demonstrate that Malthus worked deductively, rather than inductively, and that his thinking was “implicitly mathematical.”⁵ He argues that this was due in large part to the perception on the part of Malthus, his predecessors and contemporaries that mathematics belonged “to the very nature of political economy itself.”⁶ This framework allows Waterman to then address the controversial subject of conflicting rational reconstructions, arguing that if rational reconstructions differ, incoherence should be ascribed not to the reconstructions, but to the work being reconstructed themselves.

“Reappraisal of ‘Malthus the Economist,’ 1933 – 97” takes the form of a review article, surveying existing literature on Malthus and concentrating on the work of Donald Winch and Samuel Hollander. At over 40 pages it is easily the longest, and in many ways the most ambitious, of Waterman’s contributions to the discourse. The article is divided into four parts: A historiography of scholarly treatment of Malthus within the field of economics up to the 1990s is followed by a survey of literature which attempts to locate Malthus’s thought within its social and political context (termed “intellectual history”). After a short review of mathematical reconstructions of Malthusian theory, Waterman provides an appraisal of recent work in the history of economic analysis, focusing on the contributions of Samuel Hollander. His concluding remarks allude to the necessity of

⁵ Waterman, “Malthus, Mathematics, and the Mythology of Coherence,” *HOPE* 30.4 (1998): 572.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 572.

devising a method of inquiry which integrates intellectual history as performed by Winch and history of economic analysis as performed by Hollander.

First of the rhetorical devices employed to structure Waterman's overarching argument is his appeals to sources of authority. Waterman is careful to situate his work with respect to existing literature and regularly invokes the names of predecessors Samuelson, Stigler, and Schumpeter, as well as contemporaries Winch and Hollander.⁷ Another source of authority to which Waterman appeals is the authority of mathematically-obtained knowledge, which he does by explicitly identifying mathematically-obtained knowledge with knowledge of an objective reality. He states in "Malthus, Mathematics, and the Mythology of Coherence" that "mathematical reconstruction tests not merely the coherence of an author's thought in general, but its accuracy in particular."⁸ In "Analysis and Ideology" he argues that the primary benefit of formalizing Malthus's *Essay* is that it "enables us to examine the structure and coherence of Malthus's polemic," and goes on to further identify mathematics with logical consistency:

I make no claim that a mathematical model of Malthus's analysis ... can prove that he wrote the *Essay* to counter the Jacobin attack on property. Having based my 'conjecture' upon textual and historical evidence therefore, it seems proper to expose it to the possibility of 'refutation'. If the mathematical reconstruction is congruent with an interpretation of the *Essay* as a defense of property, that interpretation survives the test of internal consistency.⁹

⁷ Waterman, "On the Malthusian theory of long swings," *Canadian Journal of Economics* 20.2 (1987): 259, 265; "Analysis and Ideology in Malthus's 'Essay on Population'," *Australian Economic Papers* 31 (1992): 203 – 205, 207; "Malthus, Mathematics, and the Mythology of Coherence," *HOPE* 30.4 (1998): 577 – 79, 581, 588; "Reappraisal of 'Malthus the Economist', 1933 - 1997" *HOPE* 30 (1998): 297, 303, 305, 325, 317.

⁸ Waterman, "Malthus, Mathematics, and the Mythology of Coherence," *HOPE* 30.4 (1998): 588.

⁹ Waterman, "Analysis and Ideology in Malthus's 'Essay on Population'," *Australian Economic Papers* 31 (1992): 203.

Another important device is the metaphor, which Waterman employs occasionally but to great effect in discussions of methodology. In “Malthus, Mathematics, and the Mythology of Coherence,” mathematical reconstruction is likened to “an observational instrument, like a microscope or X-ray camera, which amplifies the historian’s ability to perceive the past.”¹⁰ The second section of “Reappraisal” compares the history of economic analysis (HEA) and intellectual history (IH) by means of a simile: “HEA is like the colored diagram that shows us how to go on the London Underground from Uxbridge or Edgware to Waterloo or Charing Cross. But IH is like a genuine, scale map of London. Therefore HEA is not a ‘subset’ of IH ... We cannot superimpose our diagram of the Underground upon a true map without distorting geographical truth.”¹¹

More frequent is the occurrence of a metaphor typical of economic texts: The mathematical or diagrammatic model, in which entities such as capital and labor are reduced to single-letter symbols and their relationships to sets of equations. An excerpt from “On the Malthusian theory of long swings” will serve to demonstrate Waterman’s use of metaphors in his rational reconstructions:

Assume throughout that population and work-force are one and the same thing, represented as N . Assume that all labor is ‘productive’ in Malthus’s original sense ... that is, employed in the agricultural sector either directly, in the fields, or indirectly, making and repairing the fixed capital goods required in agriculture. Let there be full employment. Then labor inputs into production are N per period. Let the production of homogeneous ‘food’ per period be F .¹²

Finally, it is useful to note the types and quantity of biographical information with which readers are provided. No biographical information to speak of is provided in “On

¹⁰ Waterman, “Malthus, Mathematics, and the Mythology of Coherence,” *HOPE* 30.4 (1998): 588.

¹¹ Waterman, “Reappraisal of ‘Malthus the Economist’, 1933 – 1997,” *HOPE* 30 (1998): 304.

¹² Waterman, “On the Malthusian theory of long swings,” *Canadian Journal of Economics* 20.2 (1987): 259.

the Malthusian theory of long swings,” but “Analysis and Ideology” opens with Waterman’s statement that “of all who rose to the challenge [of answering the Jacobin attack on property], Malthus was by far the most successful.”¹³ “Malthus, Mathematics, and the Mythology of Coherence” emphasizes the influence of Malthus’s mathematical education:

At a time when public schools virtually ignored the subject, the freshman Malthus was “found prepared to read” with second-year men because of his previous training in mathematics at ... Warrington Academy under Gilbert Wakefield, former Cambridge tutor turned Dissenter. There can of course be no doubt that Malthus did read mathematics at Cambridge, that he did become a ‘wrangler’ (that is, that he won first class honors in the B.A. examination which included a written test in mathematics), and that this did affect the style of his thinking in many ways.¹⁴

The modest amount of biographical information provided in “Reappraisal” emphasizes Malthus’s interest in political economy:

There is no doubt that Malthus was affected by, if not addicted to, ‘political economy’ from an early age. During his last few weeks in Cambridge, when having graduated B.A. the previous June (1788) he was supposed to be reading divinity in preparation for his Diaconal ordination (7 June 1789), he signed out *Wealth of Nations* (1784 edition) from his college library, being only the third person to do so in five years.¹⁵

Taken together, these rhetorical devices work in a variety of ways to structure the overarching polemic advanced by Waterman in his work on Malthus. Waterman’s care in situating his work with respect to the work of Samuelson and Schumpeter as well as his employment of the mathematical model establish his work solidly not only within the

¹³ Waterman, “Analysis and Ideology in Malthus’s ‘Essay on Population’,” *Australian Economic Papers* 31 (1992): 203.

¹⁴ Waterman, “Malthus, Mathematics, and the Mythology of Coherence,” *HOPE* 30.4 (1998): 581.

¹⁵ Waterman, “Reappraisal of ‘Malthus the Economist,’ 1933 – 1997,” *HOPE* 30 (1998): 295.

field of economics, but – when taken with his appeals to the authority of knowledge obtained by deduction – as endeavors in scientific inquiry.

An interesting relationship between mathematics, economics, and attainable knowledge of reality emerges when the metaphor makes its first appearance. By means of the metaphor, methodology in scholarly and scientific inquiry is consistently represented as a tool – a “map,” a “microscope” – for apprehending and manipulating that which may objectively be said to exist. In a similar gesture made in both “Analysis and Ideology” and “Reappraisal,” Waterman states that “diminishing returns without a production function are like a grin without a cat,” implying that the demands of reality require that the latter must necessarily exist regardless of whether or not we have developed the tools to perceive it.¹⁶ Waterman’s insistence that rational reconstructions function as a test of internal consistency also operates under the assumption that models can be constructed to reflect reality. Emerging from these interrelationships is an implicit argument that mathematics employed properly in economic inquiry will yield an accurate representation of reality.

And what of Malthus himself? It is important to note the aspects of Malthus’s life and work that Waterman chooses to emphasize in the relatively small amount of biographical information provided. Malthus is consistently portrayed as having been naturally inclined towards mathematics and political economy from an early age. Readers are asked to be persuaded that Malthus not only thought and worked in a manner that was implicitly mathematical, but that he regarded political economy as an inherently mathematical science. Waterman also aligns himself with Samuel Hollander in his belief

¹⁶ Waterman, “Analysis and Ideology in Malthus’s ‘Essay on Population’,” *Australian Economic Papers* 31 (1992): 204; “Reappraisal of ‘Malthus the Economist,’ 1933 – 1997,” *HOPE* 30 (1998): 316.

that in argument and methodology Malthus did not ultimately differ very much from his contemporary David Ricardo, praising Hollander for his achievement in “correcting the view that disagreements between the two were caused by methodological differences.”¹⁷

The interrelationships described above give rise to a wide range of possible meanings. I suggest that by emphasizing the “implicitly mathematical” nature of Malthus’s work, Waterman is sketching a history of economics in which mathematics was recognized as the most effective way to conduct economic inquiry well before the 20th century. He also establishes that the relationship between deductive methodology and ideology need not be antagonistic. Moreover, identifying the employment of mathematics in economic inquiry with knowledge of reality establishes economics as a discipline in which knowledge of reality is the ultimate goal.

¹⁷ Waterman, “Reappraisal of ‘Malthus the Economist,’ 1933 – 1997,” *HOPE* 30 (1998): 325.

II. Donald Winch

One of the two Englishmen under consideration in this paper, Donald Winch initially specialized in the economics of international trade while attending the London School of Economics. While continuing his studies at Princeton University under the guidance of Jacob Viner, Winch became increasingly interested in the history of economics. He wrote his doctoral dissertation on the classical economists' debate on empire and colonization. In 1963 Winch accepted a post at the University of Sussex, where he has remained for the past 45 years and where he is presently Professor Emeritus of Intellectual History. Winch's training in both economics and intellectual history lends his work on Malthus a unique perspective. The bulk of this work lies in his 1987 biography of Malthus, but an article on the Condorcet-Malthus relationship as well as Malthus's starring role in Winch's intellectual history of British political economy, *Riches and Poverty*, combine to form a thoughtful and provocative assessment of the man.

At 114 pages, *Malthus* is short for a biography. Winch begins with a discussion of Malthus's reputation, identifying Malthus's major contributions and then providing readers with a historiography of the acceptance and rejection of his ideas.¹⁸ Following a brief chapter discussing the major events and influences of Malthus's life are two chapters devoted to examining the first and second *Essays* in the historical context in which they were conceived. The fifth chapter discusses Malthus's views on a range of

¹⁸ Winch, *Malthus* (Past Masters. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 112. These contributions being, first, Malthus's recognition that rapid population growth is not always a positive or desirable phenomenon, and, second, his attempt to undermine the doctrine of human perfectibility.

issues relating to agriculture and manufacturing – providing evidence of a method of inquiry that worked not just on an economic level, but moral and historical as well – and the sixth chapter focuses on the macroeconomic aspects of Malthusian thought. In the concluding chapter Winch turns his attention to assessing what may be gained by a 20th-century audience from Malthus's work. Having by this point established Malthus as a thoughtful and competent political economist in his own right, Winch argues that the ascendancy of "Ricardian" economics over the system sketched by Malthus was due largely to the comparative simplicity of the former: Although Malthus provided "a better diagnosis of economic fluctuations in general and of the post-war slump in particular" and "his capacious ... concept of effective demand enabled him to grasp some features of unemployment, the role of public spending, and the expansive forces needed to guarantee long-term growth projects, better than the tidier, more aggregate supply-oriented ideas of his opponents," Ricardo's system was perceived as more coherent and more easily translated into public policy.¹⁹

"Malthus versus Condorcet revisited," published in 1996, elaborates on a point made in the third chapter of *Malthus*. Winch argues that although Malthus is widely regarded to have written his *Essay* to refute certain ideas set forth by Condorcet and Godwin, Malthus and Condorcet shared ideological common ground that neither shared with Godwin. Winch frames this argument with an imagined encounter between the two principles: What would have happened, he asks, if Condorcet "had lived long enough to answer Malthus's criticisms of the tenth stage of his *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des*

¹⁹ Ibid., 212.

progrès de l'esprit humain”?²⁰ The article contrasts the lives and works of Malthus, Condorcet, and Godwin in an attempt to show “why the caricature of Malthus as a conservative ideologue fails to capture those ways in which he shares the assumption associated with the term ‘Enlightenment.’”²¹

Winch’s 1996 book *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750 – 1834* seeks to locate Adam Smith, Edmund Burke, and Malthus within the development of political economy as a discipline as well as the socioeconomic circumstances which shaped the scholarly output of the time. The historical framework with respect to which Winch chooses to situate his subjects is the newly-industrialized England of the late-18th and early-19th century, though the Whig-Tory political divisions of the period are brought into play as well. Divided into three sections, Winch deals first with the intellectual relationship of Adam Smith and Edmund Burke. The third and longest section of the book is devoted to Malthus, exploring the theological aspect of his work – presented in contrast to the secular Smith’s – and its influence on the subsequent development of political economy.

Responding to Waterman in “The Reappraisal of Malthus: A Comment,” Winch turns his attention to problems of historiography in economics. He praises Waterman’s efforts and his assessment of intellectual history and the history of economic analysis in particular. Criticism is directed towards the modern tendency to differentiate Malthus the demographer too sharply from Malthus the economist; as Winch points out, “Malthus wrote when it was not possible to distinguish between demography and political economy, a situation that held true for most of the pre-Marxian classical period and may

²⁰ Winch, “Malthus versus Condorcet revisited,” *The European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 3.1 (1996): 44.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

also have held for Marx as well, despite his protestations to the contrary.”²² Winch also disputes Waterman’s “use of anti-Jacobin as a description of Malthus’s position in 1798 and later,” arguing that Malthus was not “an anti-Jacobin within the contemporary meaning of the term.”²³

It bears emphasizing that Winch is practicing history in his work on Malthus – not economics. A very different set of tools is required for the practice of history, and as the scope of Winch’s project is greater so must the rhetorical devices employed by Winch to structure his argument be sketched in broader strokes. First of these is Winch’s framing of Malthus’s production of his *Essays* with respect to the historical context in which said production occurred. Throughout his work Winch uses the social, ideological, and economic conditions in which Malthus developed his ideas as a context for understanding them. One context in which Winch consistently locates Malthus is his religious training and career. The second chapter of *Malthus* is crucial to establishing the themes of the rest of the text as it provides a chronological account of the major influences on and events of Malthus’s life. An equal amount of space in this chapter is devoted to discussing Malthus’s religious career as to his work as a political economist, and the opening paragraphs of the chapter focus not on Malthus’s early interest in political economy or aptitude for mathematics, but his religious education:

Robert was educated initially by a clergyman friend of his father, but at the age of 16 was sent to the Dissenting Academy at Warrington, where he lived with and was taught by Gilbert Wakefield, a leading and controversial figure in the Unitarian movement following his resignation from the Church of England in 1779 ... The decision to send him to be educated by Dissenters with ‘advanced’

²² Winch, “The Reappraisal of Malthus: A Comment,” *HOPE* 30.2 (1998): 358.

²³ *Ibid.*, 361.

views is an interesting sign of his father's own position, as well as being of some consequence to the son's writings later.

In 1784 Malthus went up to Jesus College, Cambridge, the college at which Wakefield had been a fellow. Here, too, Robert's path crossed with Dissenters of a radical turn of mind: one of his tutors was William Frend, who, just after Malthus left Cambridge, was removed from his Fellowship for publishing an attack on the civil disabilities imposed on Dissenters by the Test Acts, as well as for opposing the war with the new French Republic.²⁴

The question with Winch ends Chapter Two and opens the rest of his inquiry – “How did this obscure and mild-mannered curate come to be the author of a work that was to scandalize so many people?” – further identifies Malthus with his religious background.²⁵ Similarly, in “Malthus versus Condorcet revisited” both Malthus and Condorcet are described as “social Newtonians” – “exponents of the science of morals and politics in the late eighteenth-century manner” for whom religious and “moral” training was equally important as training in mathematics and political economy.²⁶ Marx's famous characterization of Malthus as an anti-progressive reactionary is countered with the evidence that “Malthus, in spite of his membership of the established Church of England, had been educated in precisely the same dissenting circles that produced Godwin, Paine and other radicals,” and Winch again cites Malthus's “social Newtonianism” as providing an ideological framework for the population principle: “According to this natural theology, a beneficent Deity, anxious to maximize happiness and minimize vice, had created fixed laws of nature that placed man under constant tension between needs and resources in order to ensure that he did not fall

²⁴ Winch, *Malthus* (Past Masters. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 121.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 125.

²⁶ Winch, “Malthus versus Condorcet revisited,” *The European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 3.1 (1996): 45.

backward along the scale of civilization.”²⁷ Winch continues to emphasize Malthus’s religious background in *Riches and Poverty*, titling Part III of the book “Robert Malthus as Political Moralist” and contrasting Malthus’s theology in his work with Smith’s secularism.

In any historical inquiry regarding Malthus, one must at some point deal with David Ricardo. The attention Winch devotes to David Ricardo is also vital to the structuring of his argument. In *Malthus*, Ricardo is first identified – along with James Mill and John Stuart Mill – as a “follower” of Malthus, and although his relationship with Malthus is given brief mention in Chapter Two it is not until the end of Chapter Five that it becomes a point of focus.²⁸ When he is discussed in-depth, Ricardo is sharply differentiated from Malthus: In Chapter Six of *Malthus* Winch states that Malthus’s “*Principles* was based on Malthus’s belief, in contrast to Ricardo, that ‘the science of political economy bears a nearer resemblance to the science of morals and politics than to that of mathematics’” and that on most matters of political economy Malthus “found himself in stark conflict with Ricardo’s thinking.”²⁹ In “Malthus versus Condorcet revisited” Ricardo is only mentioned to emphasize the Malthus’s comparative prescience regarding “processes of adjustments to new states of equilibrium: ‘The same is true of Malthus’s concern with the limits to growth, unemployment and possible sources of stagnation. It may only be by comparison with Ricardo, with his tendency to stress instantaneous market adjustment, that this characteristic of Malthus seems worth

²⁷ Ibid., 48, 52.

²⁸ Winch, *Malthus*, (Past Masters. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 116; 179 – 182.

²⁹ Ibid., 184, 190.

stressing.”³⁰ In *Riches and Poverty*, Winch casts Smith, Burke, and Malthus as stars in the intellectual history of Great Britain, while Ricardo is relegated to a supporting role.

In his employment of the rhetorical devices listed above, Winch effectively challenges several major aspects of the accepted view of Malthus. By discussing Malthus’s religious training in equal proportion to his training in political economy – and by addressing the extensive overlap of the two, for example emphasizing that it was at Cambridge received both his theological and mathematical training – Winch implicitly suggests that the two are not, as had been previously argued, antagonistic or irrelevant to one another. Structural support is provided for the argument that “[Malthus] is best seen as someone committed to the enterprise of constructing and applying a science of politics and morals,” a “reversal of Keynes’s description of the trajectory of Malthus’s career – ‘from being a caterpillar of a moral scientist and chrysalis of an historian, he could at last spread the wings of his thought and survey the world as an economist.’”³¹

By collapsing the distinction between moral training and training in political economy and then setting up Malthus and Ricardo in complete methodological opposition to one another, Winch sets them up as proponents of two systems of morals. The superiority of Malthus’s system is constantly alluded to throughout Winch’s work, and structural support for this view is provided by focusing so exclusively on Malthus that Ricardo becomes merely a supporting character. In providing a historical context for the development, acceptance and rejection of Malthus’s ideas Winch is able to provide a reason for the ascendancy of Ricardian economics over Malthusian economics: The

³⁰ Winch, “Malthus versus Condorcet revisited,” *The European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 3.1 (1996): 50.

³¹ Winch, *Malthus* (Past Masters. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 204 – 05.

inferiority of the latter is not to be blamed, but rather the shift in socioeconomic conditions towards a climate which found Malthus's combination of political economy and theology to be of little use.

If one accepts Winch's argument one must also accept the version of the history of economics shaped within his work on Malthus. As Winch states in the concluding chapter of Malthus, "once a science of morals is understood to be the main point of the exercise, it may be possible to pass a less anachronistic verdict on Malthus's successes and failures."³² Winch's conception of economics at the time of Malthus is that of a discipline inextricably bound to the theological and ideological assumptions upon which it proceeds. To what extent this assessment is meant to apply to 20th-century economics is left for the reader's consideration.

Winch's history is also a conception of economics as a discipline whose development has been affected for better or worse by the pressures of political and socioeconomic change; readers are presented with a history in which the success of an economic theory is less dependent on its validity than its perceived usefulness. This contrasts with Waterman's conception of economics as a fundamentally mathematical discipline from its inception to the present-day, but both Waterman and Winch appear to view Malthus's theology as a vital part of his political economy.

³² Ibid., 206

III. Samuel Hollander

Born in London in 1937, Samuel Hollander received training similar to Donald Winch at the London School of Economics and Princeton University. He is known principally for his work on the classical economists in the history of economic analysis. Between the years 1963 and 1998 he held positions at the University of Toronto and is currently Professor Emeritus at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

Hollander is easily the most prolific of the four scholars under consideration in this paper, having written upwards of 10 articles and a 1,000-page tome entitled *The Economics of Thomas Robert Malthus*. In the interests of brevity only the book and a select few of the articles will be summarized here – an appropriate decision, I feel, given that most of the work done in the articles published before 1996 was subsequently incorporated into the book.³³

Hollander's first major foray into Malthus studies, the 1986 article "On Malthus's population principle and social reform," attempts to rehabilitate Malthus's gloomy image by disputing the Marxian notion that Malthusian population doctrine precludes social

³³ Malthus's anticipation of the land-scarcity based growth model is the subject of "Diminishing Returns and Malthus's First Essay on Population: Theory and Application" and is discussed in Part I, Chapter Five of *The Economics of Thomas Robert Malthus* pp. 27 – 33. "Malthus's Vision of the Population Problem in the Essay on Population" further explores this theme and is specifically concerned with the point at which Malthus began attempting to account for accelerating population; this is discussed in Part I, Chapter 10 of *The Economics of Thomas Robert Malthus* pp. 47 – 56. Hollander's argument in "Malthus's Abandonment of Agricultural Protectionism: A Discovery in the History of Economic Thought" that Malthus was ultimately persuaded of the inefficacy of protectionism is restated in Part Five of *The Economics of Thomas Robert Malthus* pp. 807 – 868. "On Malthus's Physiocratic References" and "Malthus as a Physiocrat: Surplus versus Scarcity" explore the extent to which Malthus was exposed to and influenced by the Physiocrats, a theme which is explored throughout *The Economics of Thomas Robert Malthus* but most pointedly in Part II, Chapters Six and Eight. Part Five of *The Economics of Thomas Robert Malthus* also restates the evidence presented in "More on Malthus and Agricultural Protection," a response to John Pullen's criticism of the argument that Malthus abandoned agricultural protectionism.

improvement “under any form of institutional arrangement.”³⁴ Hollander supports his argument by showing, in an exploration of various aspects of Malthusian theory, that “hard-line” Malthusianism is not essential to the classical growth model.³⁵

The Economics of Thomas Robert Malthus (hereafter referred to as ETRM) assesses Malthus’s contributions to economic analysis. In the introduction Hollander identifies the “major outcome” of his study as “the discernment of a possible backward link between the Physiocrats and Malthus, partly mediated via Adam Smith, and a forward link to Sraffa in so far as Malthus developed explicitly a corn-profit model.”³⁶ Hollander also identifies the main preoccupation of the text as the degree to which Malthus “retained his physiocratic orientation” over the course of his life and work.³⁷ What follows is a massive endeavor in the history of economics analysis – a 1,051-page text comprising five parts which are further divided into 19 chapters, framed by a preface, introduction, and conclusion. The prodigious length of the work can be ascribed to Hollander’s extensive use of textual evidence as well as the sheer scope of his project.

Part I – “Early exploration in growth and development theory” – summarizes the texts which form Malthus’s contribution to political economy by discussing them in chronological order: The first *Essay on Population*, the early Malthus-Ricardo correspondence (1813 – 1814), the *Inquiry into Rent*, the later Malthus-Ricardo correspondence, and the revised *Essay on Population*. The other four sections are devoted to assessing Malthus’s work on various now-established economic concepts: Part II, for example, covers price theory, value measurement, surplus versus scarcity, the

³⁴ Hollander, “On Malthus’s population principle and social reform,” *HOPE* 18.2 (1986): 187.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 189.

³⁶ Hollander, *The Economics of Thomas Robert Malthus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 4.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

relationship of wage and employment, and profit-rate analysis. Subsequent sections look at employment, aggregate demand, and trade policy. In the Introduction Hollander states that he views the text as a companion to his earlier *The Economics of David Ricardo*, and this attitude is supported by the substantial attention given to the Malthus-Ricardo relationship. Hollander's ultimate assessment of Malthus in his concluding chapter is of a committed deductive scientist who was influenced by but ultimately rejected Physiocratic methodology in favor of a methodology highly similar to that of Ricardo.

"An Invited Comment on 'Reappraisal of 'Malthus the Economist,' 1933 – 1997,' by A.M.C. Waterman" expresses approval of Waterman's "eminently fair evaluation and ... remarkably thorough coverage of some half-century of secondary literature on Thomas Robert Malthus" but voices some concerns over his taxonomy of methodology.³⁸ Hollander suggests that intellectual history and the history of economic analysis are not as mutually exclusive as Waterman implies, and that "any single, mentally healthy scholar may well engage in relatively narrow HEA in the morning and relatively broad IH in the afternoon."³⁹

"Malthus and Classical Economics: The Malthus-Ricardo Relationship," published in 2001 – and at 11 pages, a remarkably short work for Hollander – investigates the difficulty of locating Malthus within the classical school of economics, a point explored previously in ETRM. Hollander begins by reviewing problems of definition and establishing as his point of departure Piero Sraffa's neglect of Malthus in

³⁸ Hollander, "An Invited Comment on 'Reappraisal of 'Malthus the Economist,' 1933 – 1997,' by A.M.C. Waterman," *HOPE* 30:2 (1998): 335.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 341.

his assessment of the “pantheon” of classical economists. Hollander then goes on to show that in most methodological respects Malthus differed little from Ricardo, emphasizing what he sees as Malthus’s ultimate rejection of agricultural protectionism and “surprisingly orthodox” perspective on monetary and fiscal policy in particular.⁴⁰ He concludes that “the validity of referring to a common ‘classical’ theory of economic policy” is reinforced by Malthus’s orthodoxy and attention to supply-side considerations.⁴¹

“‘New avenues for research in Malthus studies’: On Hashimoto and Pullen’s ‘Two Unpublished Letters of Malthus,’” only five pages in length, comprises a brief comment on Hashimoto and Pullen’s recent discovery regarding Malthus’s personal correspondence. Hollander once again takes up the argument, much criticized by Pullen, that Malthus recanted his support of agricultural protectionism, this time identifying elements in the two previously unpublished letters which support this interpretation.

Although Hollander professes to be practicing the *history* of economic analysis, it is overwhelmingly the voice and language of an economist he employs in his texts. His dense, jargon-laden prose style assumes that concepts such as “the Ricardian vice” and “classical growth theory” as well as names such as Jevons, Schumpeter, and Cannan require no introduction. In short, Hollander writes exclusively for readers with comparatively advanced training in economics, as the few sentences that open “Diminishing Returns and Malthus’s First *Essay on Population: Theory and Application*” will serve to illustrate:

⁴⁰ Hollander, “Malthus and Classical Economics: The Malthus-Ricardo Relationship,” *Cahiers d’Économie Politique* 38 (2001): 20.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

Malthus's intentions by his celebrated "arithmetic ratio" of food increase and "geometric ratio" of population increase remain in dispute. It is still a matter of debate whether this formulation reflected the principle of diminishing returns. We have Cannan's insistence upon the absence of the law in any meaningful sense
...⁴²

The opening passage of Part I, Chapter 1, Section 6 of ETRM provides another example of Hollander's enthusiastic employment of technical jargon:

Now if, in fact, the population growth rate (g_L) decelerates in line with that of food (g_F), then with $g_F = 0$, population growth, too, will cease. Such is the stationary state. Malthus, it is true, also alludes to the 'forcing' of population: 'The only true criterion of a real and permanent increase in the population, of any country, is the increase of the means of subsistence,' but in China 'the people have been habituated by degrees to live almost upon the smallest possible quantity of food. There must have been periods in such countries when population increased permanently without an increase in the means of subsistence.' But the major European states (England and France) were not subject to this problem of excessive population growth. The data regarding birth and death rates indicated that 'population has accommodated itself, very nearly to the average produce of each country,' so that periodic plagues 'to repress what is redundant' are not a feature of the recent record.⁴³

Also illustrated in the passage above is Hollander's frequent, extensive and at times confusing employment of textual evidence, notable not only for being the foremost contributor to the prodigious length of his works but also for the way in which it serves to shape his argument. Of special importance is Hollander's citation of Malthus, which is done with such scrupulous zeal throughout his work that the *Essays* and letters seem to have been reprinted practically in their entirety in ETRM alone. Throughout Hollander's work, Malthus's words are seamlessly integrated into the main body of the text so that

⁴² Hollander, "Diminishing returns and Malthus's 'First Essay on Population'," *Economies et Sociétés* 23.6 (1989):12.

⁴³ Hollander, *The Economics of Thomas Robert Malthus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 33.

readers must pay careful attention to whether they are reading Hollander or Malthus. This technique is evidenced in Part Five, Chapter 17, Part 3 of ETRM, which deals with Malthus's supposed recantation of agricultural protectionism:

Apart from the question of the price level, there is also recognition that, since trade is essentially barter, permitting agricultural imports would be to the advantage of manufacturing by way of expanded exports: 'As all trade is ultimately a trade of barter and the power of purchasing cannot be permanently extended without an extension of the power of selling, the foreign countries which supplied us with corn would evidently have their power of purchasing our commodities increased, and would thus contribute more effectually to our commercial and manufacturing prosperity.'

So far we have, in effect, a detailed elaboration of the 1813 letter. There are also arguments for some intervention. But these include a case for Adam Smith's proposal for countervailing tariffs on products (including corn) subject to local taxes: 'If the whole of the difference in the expense occasioned by taxation, and the precise amount of that taxation as affecting corn, could be clearly ascertained; the simple and obvious way of restoring things to their natural level and enabling us to grow corn, as in a state of perfect freedom, would be to lay precisely the same amount of tax on imported corn [2nd ed.: in the same proportion] and grant the same amount in a bounty upon exportation. Dr. Smith observes, that when the necessities of a state have obliged it to lay a tax upon a home commodity, a duty of equal amount upon the same kind of commodity when imported from abroad, only tends to restore the level of industry which had necessarily been disturbed by the tax.'⁴⁴

That Ricardo plays such a large role in Hollander's works on Malthus also bears scrutiny. Hollander immediately establishes Ricardo as a figure of equal importance to Malthus in ETRM, stating in the Introduction that he considers the text to be a companion to his work on David Ricardo and devoting several paragraphs in the Introduction of the former to a discussion of Ricardo's side of the Malthus-Ricardo relationship:

It was something of a love-hate relationship for Ricardo. He took Malthus very seriously – why else would the lengthy correspondence and his *Notes* on Malthus's *Principles* and *Measure of Value*? But he was frustrated. He

⁴⁴ Ibid., 823.

complained in 1815 of the excessive complexity, even incoherence, of Malthus's position as it emerged in the essays of 1814 – 15.⁴⁵

Ricardo remains a strong presence throughout the text, from Hollander's summary of the Malthus-Ricardo correspondence in Part One to his discussion of Ricardo's influence on Malthus's *The High Price of Bullion* in Part Three to the protectionism debate covered in Part Five.

Hollander's unremitting use of technical jargon establishes his work as history written exclusively for economists and economic historians. His extensive treatment of Ricardo in his work on Malthus provides structural support for his argument that in methodology they ultimately displayed more similarities than differences, and by aligning Malthus with Ricardo Hollander establishes him firmly within the classical tradition. Hollander's technique of integrating quotes from primary sources seamlessly into the narrative of his argument produces several effects: At the most superficial level, it lessens the distance between Hollander's text and the text he is citing, visually collapsing the two into one entity. It also allows him to situate excerpts from primary texts within a theoretical framework of his own construction, making it easier to deal with problems of definition. An example can be found in Hollander's discussion of Malthus and macroeconomic stabilization, in which Hollander's "loan-financed government expenditure" is equated to Malthus's "expenditure":

In a criticism of predictions of national 'bankruptcy' in consequence of a higher national debt, Malthus seems to hint that loan-financed government expenditure was required in 1816: 'When Hume ... and Adam Smith ... prophesied that a little increase of national debt beyond the then amount of it, would probably

⁴⁵ Ibid., 5.

occasion bankruptcy, the main cause of their error was the very natural one, of not being able to see the vast increase of productive power to which the nation would subsequently attain. An expenditure, which would have absolutely crushed the country in 1770, might be little more than what was necessary to call forth its prodigious powers of production in 1816.’⁴⁶

The history of economics Hollander presents for readers in his work on Malthus is a history characterized foremost by its linearity: Not only is economic analysis assumed to have existed in the late 18th century, but methodologies employed in economic analysis at that time are assumed to be relevant to economic analysis in the present day. In addition to challenging the accepted view of Malthus, collapsing Malthusian and Ricardian methodologies into one entity removes what had previously been a rather uncomfortable hiccup in the stolid progression from Say to Samuelson. By reframing the controversial elements of Malthusian theory and arguing that Malthus ultimately saw the error of his protectionist ways, Hollander effectively eliminates the heterodox from classical economics.

This is similar to Waterman’s effort to establish economics as a mathematical discipline at its inception. What emerges from Waterman’s and Hollander’s treatments of Malthus is a history of improvement in methodology, and it is no coincidence that both scholars quote Samuelson’s famous dictum that “within every classical economist there is to be discerned a modern economist trying to be born.”⁴⁷ Hollander’s history of economic analysis contrasts sharply with the intellectual history of Winch, who presents Malthusian theory and Ricardian theory as different creatures entirely.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 625.

⁴⁷ Waterman, “Analysis and Ideology in Malthus’s ‘Essay on Population’,” *Australian Economic Papers* 31 (1992): 204; Hollander, *The Economics of Thomas Robert Malthus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996),

IV. John Pullen

Educated in Sydney, Newcastle, and Paris, John Pullen is presently an Honorary Fellow of the School of Business Economics and Public Policy at the University of New England. His contribution to the discourse consists of six journal articles published between the years 1981 and 2001 and is perhaps most interesting for its open criticism of Hollander's argument that Malthus ultimately abandoned agricultural protectionism.⁴⁸ Since most of Pullen's articles are reasonably short, a brief summary of each will be provided.

"Malthus' Theological Ideas and Their Influence on his Principle of Population" opens with the contention that an understanding of Malthus's moral system is essential to an appreciation of his contributions to political economy. In the four sections that follow, Pullen first examines the theological ideas operating in Malthus's first *Essay*, then situates Malthus's religious beliefs with respect to those sanctioned by the Church. Pullen emphasizes Malthus's unorthodox views – his concept of evil as existing "not to create despair, but activity," in particular – and goes on to argue that the material on theology was omitted from subsequent editions of the *Essay* because the Church found them objectionable.⁴⁹ He concludes that Malthus's reputation of "illogicality" amongst some

⁴⁸ Two articles – "Malthus on Indolence," published in 2003 in the book *Evolutionary economics and human nature*, and "Keynes's Criticisms of Malthus, and Malthus's Reply: The Concept of Effective Supply" – are not of immediate relevant to the discourse.

⁴⁹ Pullen, "Malthus' theological ideas and their influence on his principle of population," *HOPE* 13 (1981): 46.

commentators “is due not to his system of ideas, but to simplistic interpretations that ignore the theological aspects.”⁵⁰

“Correspondence Between Malthus and His Parents,” published in 1986, reviews Malthus’s personal correspondence to show that far from the “nasty-pensioned-parson” of his contemporary William Cobbett’s description, Malthus was actually a remarkably decent fellow.⁵¹ “Some New Information on the Rev. T.R. Malthus” takes a similar approach towards supplementing existing biographical material by examining unpublished but relevant information in the diocesan records of Norwich and Winchester. Pullen divides his inquiry into short, individual examinations of the fourteen different pieces of information under consideration, among them a testimonial of the Master and Fellows of Jesus College supporting Malthus’s application for ordination, Malthus’s declaration and subscription to the 39 Articles of the Church of England and Three Articles of the Canon, and a “country” testimonial by rectors of three parishes in support of Malthus’s application for ordination. He concludes with “A comment on Malthus’s theological orthodoxy,” stating that although it has been argued that the omission of theological material from the second edition of the *Essay* indicates that Malthus recanted his unorthodox theological views, the evidence provided by the letters and records suggest that only a partial recantation occurred.

“Malthus on Agricultural Protection: An Alternate View” is Pullen’s response to Hollander’s argument that Malthus ultimately abandoned agricultural protectionism. He argues that the “textual evidence used to support a recantation hypothesis is amenable to alternative interpretations” and goes on to refute, point by point, all of the evidence

⁵⁰ Ibid., 53.

⁵¹ Pullen, “Correspondence Between Malthus and His Parents,” *HOPE* 18.1 (1986): 54.

Hollander marshals in “Malthus and Agricultural Protectionism: A Discovery in the History of Economic Thought.” Pullen concludes that “although Malthus in 1826 recommended a *reduction* in the level of the duty on imported corn, the textual evidence so far produced is ... not sufficiently strong to justify the claim that in his later years he *abandoned* this agricultural exception to the ‘great general rule’ of free trade.”⁵²

In “The Last Sixty-Five Years of Malthus Scholarship” Pullen responds to A.M.C. Waterman’s “Reappraisal of ‘Malthus the Economist,’ 1933 – 1997,” focusing on the problems of Waterman’s proposed taxonomy of methodology. Pullen argues that intellectual history and the history of economic analysis should not be regarded as mutually exclusive. He also criticizes the attempts to “mathematicize” Malthus, arguing that mathematical reconstructions are only useful to readers who are familiar enough with Malthus’s work to appraise them and expressing concern over the apparent ease with which an economist performing a rational reconstruction might “betray” the text. He concludes by expressing his desire to see Malthus’s contributions to economics be made useful to current economic problems and policies.

“Two Unpublished Letters of Malthus, with Notes on the Connections between Malthus and William Smith, MP” is simply a short summary of the contents of two previously unpublished letters of Malthus’s personal correspondence. Pullen and his colleague Hashimoto suggest that the letters provide evidence of a stronger relationship with William Smith than had previously been suspected.

⁵² Pullen, “Malthus on Agricultural Protection: An Alternative View,” *HOPE* 27.3 (1995): 527.

In part because he has yet to produce a book-length text on Malthus, Pullen's work is characterized foremost by its uniquely narrow scope. Principle among the stated objectives of several of the articles discussed above is to reassess Malthus's reputation as an unpleasant and unsympathetic person, a matter with which Pullen has concerned himself more exclusively than Waterman, Winch, or Hollander. In his efforts to persuade readers of Malthus's genuinely decent nature Pullen relies upon a type of evidence not commonly used in economic texts: Items of personal correspondence, testimonials, and information from the public records are deployed to provide an account of Malthus's character from the perspective of the people presumably closest to him. However Pullen makes an interesting move in "Correspondence between Malthus and his parents" to differentiate between merely biographical information and information which should be taken into account in an assessment of economic thought: "[The letters] do not add anything of a substantive nature to our knowledge of Malthus's later views on population and political economy. Their interest lies rather in the insights they provide into his education and early personal life."⁵³

No such move is made in "Some New Information on the Rev. T. R. Malthus" when Pullen discusses previously unpublished information from the diocesan records of Winchester and Norwich. Rather, the information is employed to support an argument which Pullen views as directly related to Malthus's economic thought – that Malthus persisted in certain aspects of his unorthodox theology even after omitting the majority of it from his revised *Essay*.

⁵³ Pullen, "Correspondence Between Malthus and His Parents," *HOPE* 18.1 (1986): 135.

Pullen's work is also characterized by the near absence of a framework locating Malthus with respect to his contemporary political economists such as Ricardo and Mill. The exception to this is his criticism of Hollander, in which a discussion of the Malthus-Ricardo relationship is unavoidable. Pullen nevertheless manages to limit the discussion to one paragraph:

Against this reduction interpretation, it has been argued ... that the sentence does not imply 'that only the drawback was to be à la Ricardo,' because 'Ricardo's drawback is part of a package designed to assure competitive resource allocation.' But, in my view, the structure of the sentence does not lend itself to that interpretation. The structure and positioning of the passage 'and a bounty ... Mr. Ricardo' clearly indicate that Malthus was endorsing Ricardo's recommendation with respect to the bounty, but does not indicate that Malthus was endorsing Ricardo's recommendation with regard to the tariff on corn imports.⁵⁴

Evidenced somewhat by the excerpt above is the way in which Pullen writes for an audience possessing not only a high level of training in economics but a reasonably developed awareness of trends in Malthus studies as well. Pullen does not provide much in the way of background information in introducing the subjects of his inquiries, assuming a prior knowledge on the part of his reader. The introduction to "Some new information on the Rev. T. R. Malthus" comprises a single paragraph:

Thanks to the efforts of Malthus's main biographers – Otter (1836), Empson (1837), Bonar (1924), and James (1979) – a considerable amount of information has already been made available on his life as a clergyman of the Church of England. This can now be supplemented by unpublished information contained in the diocesan records held in the Hampshire Record Office, Winchester, and the Norfolk Record Office, Norwich.⁵⁵

The introduction to "Malthus' theological ideas and their influence on his principle of population," while longer, dispenses with the necessity of reviewing existing

⁵⁴ Pullen, "Malthus on Agricultural Protection: An Alternative View," *HOPE* 27.3 (1995): 518.

⁵⁵ Pullen, "Some New Information on the Rev. T. R. Malthus," *HOPE* 19.1 (1987): 127.

literature on the subject at hand by assuming that readers are already intimately familiar with it. The opening line of the article reads:

Malthus's views on population are well known, having been the subject of a continuing debate since the publication in 1798 of *An Essay on the Principle of Population*.

Pullen's work occupies a rather strange place between the highly technical, textually-reliant work of Hollander and historically-minded work of Winch. Like Hollander, Pullen is writing for a readership comprising economists and economic historians – although since his output consists solely of scholarly journal articles published in scholarly economic journals this is perhaps not much of an observation. More interesting are the relationships between Pullen's employment of unconventional types of textual evidence, narrow focus on situating Malthus within a theological framework, and evident disinterest in situating Malthus with respect to his fellow political economists. Pullen argues that an understanding of Malthus's morals is necessary to a fair evaluation of his political economy; his method for gaining a better understanding of Malthus's morals is to find expression and evidence of them within Malthus's writings, then situate them with respect to the orthodox religious views of late-18th and early-19th century England. Information from the diocesan records is brought forth as valid evidence of what constituted such orthodox religious views as well as evidence of Malthus's own. Information found in Malthus's personal correspondence is presented as evidence of his goodness of character but described as irrelevant to an understanding of his work in political economy in both "Correspondence between Malthus and his parents" and "Two Unpublished Letters of Malthus, with Notes on the

Connections between Malthus and William Smith, MP.” It is interesting that Hollander, by contrast, is quite content to mine the “two unpublished letters” for more evidence that Malthus abandoned agricultural protectionism.

What emerges from this arrangement of types of textual evidence and emphasis on reading Malthus’s work in the theological context in which it was produced is a view of Malthus and of economics as a discipline similar to that of Winch. But whereas Winch emphasizes Malthus’s theology as a contributing factor to his later unpopularity, Pullen argues that upon reading Malthus within the appropriate theological context, accusations of incoherence and logical inconsistency become untenable. For Pullen, for the relative coherence of an economic theory to be fairly assessed it must be understood within the *ideological* framework in which it was conceived. This contrasts with Hollander’s history of economics in which Malthus’s theology is treated as only marginally relevant to his economic thought.

Conclusion:

Reading Economics

Thus far in this paper I have surveyed a selection of recent work in Malthus studies by A.M.C. Waterman, Donald Winch, Samuel Hollander, and John Pullen. After summarizing the arguments of the works under consideration, I then engaged in a short explication of rhetorical devices employed to structure said arguments, focusing specifically on the devices used in the scholar's portrayal Malthus. In my analysis of the scholars' work I have established that each has structured his texts by the use of rhetorical devices which reflects and promotes his conception of the history of economics: To Waterman, the economist and sometime-intellectual historian, economics is a discipline inherently deductive from its inception and Malthus's value to modern readers lies chiefly in the mathematical nature of his work. The rich picture intellectual historian Winch paints of the history of economics is of a discipline shaped by changing socioeconomic conditions as well as other non-scientific disciplines; as such, Malthus is portrayed as a man who integrated his system of morals within a scientific framework, developing a complex set of ideas that ultimately was rejected in favor of the more "useful" system of Ricardo. For historian of economic analysis Hollander, the language of 19th-century political economy can be slotted more or less cleanly into the theoretical framework of 20th-century economics, and a history is proclaimed in which the major dissenting figure of early economic thought ultimately yields – when presented with sufficient evidence, of course – to the ascendant orthodoxy; Malthus and Ricardo's methodological differences are de-emphasized and ultimately dismissed. Pullen is aligned somewhat with Winch in his view of theology as an important context, but where Winch

sees a framework for understanding the acceptance or rejection of Malthus's work, Pullen sees a framework for assessing its coherence. Pullen's economics is a discipline in which theory can only be fairly assessed if one takes into account the ideology which frames it.

I have also attempted in my summaries to sketch the development of the discourse over time. In the early 1980s the scholars began with a campaign to destabilize the long-standing assessment of Malthus as having spawned a "dismal doctrine," Winch arguing that such pessimism would have been inconsistent with his system of morals and Hollander arguing that Malthus's theoretical contributions do not operate upon inherently pessimistic assumptions. With the new framework of "Malthus as humanist" in place, there followed a period in which Malthus's contributions were reevaluated. The most controversial idea to have been produced during this time was Hollander's claim that Malthus ultimately abandoned agricultural protectionism, an argument that received extensive criticism from Pullen. The fourth stage of the development of the discourse was occasioned by Waterman's review article: Nearing the turn of the century, the four scholars turned their attention more seriously to questions of historiography and explored the implications of their work on Malthus. Waterman's methodological taxonomy in which intellectual history and the history of economic analysis are viewed as "strictly incommensurable and non-competing" received praise from Winch, conditional acceptance from Hollander, and criticism from Pullen; his defense of mathematical reconstruction received criticism from Winch and Pullen but was left unaddressed by Hollander.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Waterman, "Reappraisal of 'Malthus the Economist,' 1933 – 1997," *HOPE* 30 (1998): 322.

Differences in training and method notwithstanding – although it is interesting that Hollander and Winch both received their training at the London School of Economics and Princeton – all four of the scholars share the common desire to establish Malthus as more important to modern economists than has previously been recognized. But still the question remains: Why Malthus, and why now?

I do not propose an in-depth exploration of this question here in my concluding remarks; much less do I seek to provide definitive answers. But with the indulgence of the reader I would like to suggest that the reappraisal of Malthus that has occurred over the last 25 years is part of the larger, ongoing struggle to define economics, which is still a relatively young – and therefore unstable – discipline. That four individuals with such different perspectives and methodological training can all describe themselves as *economists* is somewhat disconcerting as they frequently seem to scarcely be speaking the same language. All four of the scholars remark at some point in their work upon the remarkably high level of controversy that still exists in the discipline regarding Malthus – Waterman and Pullen observing the tendency of rational reconstructions to differ from reading to reading, Winch sketching a historiography of Malthus's unpopularity, Hollander stirring up more controversy by arguing that Malthus's methodology was not so unorthodox after all. All four of the scholars also appear to be reasonably open to the idea that social, economic, and ideological conditions shape the development of economic theory. But regardless of how much Winch may talk about economics being influenced by other non-scientific disciplines, it is still the language of Karl Popper he invokes in his discussion on methodology:

To distance myself from both relativism and externalism, I prefer Popperian language: if we are bold in propounding hypotheses about past meanings, we should be equally bold in subjecting them to empirical, that is, textual and contextual, tests.⁵⁷

Pullen concludes his response to Waterman with the statement that “it would be in keeping ... with [Malthus’s] methodology and spirit if modern studies of Malthus were conducted ‘with a view to their practical application,’ and if, beginning with a rigorous empirical analysis ... of his texts and contexts, they were directed to assessing the relevance of his thought to current economic problems and policies.”⁵⁸ What Waterman, Winch, Hollander and Pullen are all convinced of equally is economics as a science. The value of economics lies in its ability to identify universal laws and use them to predict behavior. As seemingly new and unprecedented economic phenomena arise, economists are driven to re-examine assumptions – and with them, existing literature. If economics is to succeed as a science, the work of pioneers such as Malthus must be made intelligible and useful to modern economists, whether as an alternative to or further support of classical theory.

In their work on Malthus Waterman, Winch, Hollander, and Pullen have been – one is tempted to suspect somewhat unwittingly – working through a number of methodological and historiographical problems. But have they succeeded in rehabilitating Malthus’s reputation to the point that his work is regarded differently than it was 25 years ago? The short answer is, not yet. Perhaps within certain academic circles the term *Malthusian* now carries a positive connotation, but financial and economic publications such as *The Financial Times* and *The Economist* still use it in the same breath as

⁵⁷ Winch, “The Reappraisal of Malthus: A Comment,” *HOPE* 30.2 (1998): 356.

⁵⁸ Pullen, “The Last Sixty-Five Years of Malthus Scholarship,” *HOPE* 30.2 (1998): 351.

pessimistic. Pop economics books contain no impassioned defenses of Malthus's principle; exciting new biographies on the Reverend have not been forthcoming. The four scholars' championship of Malthus does not show signs of having influenced thought outside the realm of the university.

As I hope has been demonstrated in this paper, there is much to be gained from the formal analysis of economic texts. To borrow an admonishment from McCloskey, "economists should become more self-conscious about their rhetoric, because they will then better know why they agree or disagree, and will find it less easy to dismiss contrary arguments on merely methodological grounds."⁵⁹ Given that their work is centered on reading economics, economists such as Waterman, Winch, Hollander and Pullen would do well to heed such advice.

⁵⁹ McCloskey, "The Rhetoric of Economics," *Journal of Economic Literature* 21.2 (1983): 482.

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